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CANADA

COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, GAME AND
FUR-BEARING ANIMALS

General publication G-6
Attracting Wild Fowl

BY

JACK MINER
Kingsville, Ontario

Reprinted from

"Wild Life: its Conservation and Protection
of the Commission of Conservation




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WILD GEESE ON PREMISES OF MR. JACK MINER, ESSEX CO., ONT.



WILD GEESE ON PREMISES OF MR. JACK MINER, ESSEX CO., ONT.

The above ponds are the stopping off places for the Canada geese, in their migratory flights in the spring and autumn.
From a nucleus of five, the number has grown to thousands.

Photos, Courtesy Mr. Jack Miner

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Attracting Wild Fowl

BY

JACK MINER, of Kingsville, Ont.

I assure you it is a privilege for me to meet with so many bird lovers. We love out-of-door creatures, or we would not be here this morning.

Now, you will have to pardon my lack of education. I am one of those men who are born bare-footed and educated out-of-doors. However, I was father's favourite. Perhaps it is not just the proper thing for fathers to show partiality, but mine did. He always called me in the morning to build the fires; possibly in that way I got out a little earlier than the rest to hear the birds singing.

Outside of unavoidable sadness, my life has been one continuous round of enjoyment; the failures and disappointments and the dark storm clouds have been wiped out of existence by success, by out-of-door life—a light which has brightened my path right up to the present and given a faint glimpse of the beyond. I have heard people say they have read that there was never a tribe of heathen discovered on earth who did not worship some kind of god. No intelligent man can live out of doors without being compelled to believe that there is an over-ruling power.

God created the fowls of the air, and so on, before he created man, according to Genesis, 1st chapter and 21st verse. Then in the 26th verse, we find these words: "And God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Does that mean that we are to have dominion over those big flocks of wild geese, so far away that you have to look twice to see them? You know how high they sometimes are; you can just hear them. That is what it says. Then we read further in Deuteronomy, chapter 22, 6th and 7th verses: "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; but thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee;

that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest prolong thy days." But, if a duck lit in one of the rivers here, all the educated people in this room would rush down—there would be ten guns out there to shoot it.

Reading in the book of Job, we find these words:

"No doubt but ye *are* the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I *am* not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?.....But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee."

Barn Swallows
Appreciate
Protection

When the first barn swallows came to our tile shed, on our little farm at Kingsville, Ont., they nested 300 feet away—as far away as they could get from where we were working. We protected the swallows from their deadly enemy, the sparrow that man brought to Canada—the English sparrow; not the one that God put here, don't forget that. They destroyed the first brood, but we protected the swallows and consequently the sparrows did not destroy any more. Remember, the shed had stood there for ten years, equally as inviting. The second year there were two nests; the fifth year there were twenty nests in the tile shed, and, instead of being as far from us as they could possibly get, fifteen out of the twenty nests were within twenty feet of where we were working. They had come to us for protection. You have to believe that. They destroy large numbers of house flies. The ladies say—of course, the ladies never tell what is not true—that there is not more than one house fly now where there were five previous to the coming of these barn swallows, purple martins, and so on. Scientists tell us that the fly will carry that deadly disease, typhoid, and, if we preserve the swallow which destroys these flies, surely it shall be well with us and we shall prolong our days. We protected one nest; now, one hundred swallows are raised in that shed every year.

Robins are
Enemies of
Cut-Worms.

Now, what good is the robin? Everybody knows the robin. A boy came along the road with a .22 rifle, saw a robin sitting on the fence and killed it. I went over and picked the robin up. Two cutworms were squirming on the ground; the robin had had them in his beak. I held the bird up, and two more fell out of his mouth. Remember, one cutworm will cut down five tomato plants in a night. This fellow does his work and then hides under the soil; Mr. Robin comes hopping along, picks in there and pulls him out—and turns him into a robin. If anyone tells you that a robin will destroy one hundred cutworms

in a day take it from me that it is true. The following morning, this boy promised me that he would not shoot another robin. In the fir tree by our house were two little robins dead under the nest and two in the nest just alive. We took these two little robins in, warmed them up, and made some custard for them—one egg, half a cup of milk, no sugar. They couldn't open their mouths, they were so nearly gone. We took one of them, pried his beak open and dropped in some custard, and the first thing we knew he 'came to,' and in a minute or so began to squeak for more custard. The other little fellow was supposed to be dead, but he, too, soon began to look around, and these two robins became the sweetest birds we ever had on the premises.

You know how a door will slam once in a while in the house. Well, there was a good slam one morning when someone had left the screen door open and my son Jasper's pet robin had come in and was resting in what we call the cold storage—a room in the front of the house which is sometimes called the front 'parlour.' Here he was on Mother's picture, and the broom was going smartly after him. Jasper came with a tin and carried friend robin out to safety. That is how we get enjoyment out of these things.

Do birds come back to their homes? How many times I have been asked that question. Oh yes, they come back. "Well, how do you know, Jack?" Then you would have to talk about the weather—switch the subject. But I will tell you the rest of the story.

Wild Ducks
are Tamed

I hatched four wild young mallards—well, I didn't hatch them; I stole the eggs. A domestic fowl eventually hatched out four little wild ducks, and there they were, under the old hen, wilder than March hares. However, the old hen's voice soon brought them out, and several little girls began to come out from under their stepmother and look around, and eventually they would take some of the custard right in my presence. These ducks soon were so tame that the tap on a tin pan would bring them to you. They got to be quite a size and we named them, respectively, Polly, Delilah, Susan and Helen, and presented each one with an aluminium tag, on which was printed the words, "Box 48, Kingsville, Ont." The four ducks migrated on or about December 10, 1912. Dr. Rutherford, of Chatham, shot Helen at Mitchell bay, lake St. Clair. How they got to the west of us I don't know, for they started south. I suppose they had taken such a liking for me, that they started for Ohio, where I was born. On March 14, 1913, Polly came home. On March

18, Delilah came home, and on March 30, Susan, although wounded in the wing and foot, returned home. Is that not an answer to the question, do birds return to the place from whence they migrate? Well, I wanted to go down, hitch up the 'self-starter,' and go to town, so that someone would ask me, "Do birds return home?"

They migrated that autumn, and on March 14, 1914, Polly again came home. On March 21, Delilah came home for the second time. The two girls brought a Yankee sweetheart with them and raised families the next year; and it is interesting, when they are arriving, to see the ducks come down and try to coax their new mates down too.

Well, they migrated again for the third time. In the spring of 1915, Delilah got home first; she arrived on March 13, and Polly came home on March 16. Polly got her beak a little too far ahead, and a shot had grazed right across it and cut the side off leaving it hanging. She would just stand around with her mouth open. I got some porridge and mixed custard with it and, on the second day, I had Polly in my right hand. In a week or so I took these ducks to a photographer's, stood them on a table, brushed them down and talked quietly to them and got a photograph of them.

Returned for Fifth Time We often make remarks about 'silly' old geese and 'silly' old ducks; sometimes I wonder what the ducks and geese are saying about us. These ducks have shied around to keep clear of people hiding in ambush for them; then they come home, and, in a few days, are eating out of our hands. Isn't that worth thinking about? Talk about loving these birds; you simply can't help it, if you are human. Polly said: "I am going to stay with you, Jack, from now on," and she stayed with my hens in the winters of 1915 and 1916. However, in the spring of 1916, she was shot, but Delilah migrated and got back on March 5, for the fifth time; migrated again and got back in 1917 on March 25, and, last spring, she came back for the seventh time on March 19. Do birds return to their homes? I know that it was the same tag she had on, because my wife and I took it off her leg after it had been on five years, and presented her with a new tag. I am now making my tag system a little more interesting, by putting on the blank side a verse of scripture. Everybody who brings down a goose with my tag on it it gets a verse of scripture, whether he needs it or not. Mack Stewart, of Tennessee, writes: "Send me the history of this bird, or of *some other Canadian bird*." Corporal John R. Smith writes: "White, age 23, *still unclaimed, can you help me out*?" So I took the two letters and handed them over to the ladies in our



YOUNG LIVE BEAVER

Photo, Courtesy Mr. E. E. Lemieux



FLOODS AT POINT PEELE, ONT., IN THE SPRING OF 1919

Photo shows flooded land at the south end of Point Pelee.

Photo, Courtesy Mr. F. H. Conover

Sunday school, and the same day one of them came back. There are ten of us in one class and we went and stamped this on our tag—"Hebrews 10, 24," (Let us consider one another).

Now where do these ducks go?

"Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air and they shall tell thee."

I have caught and tagged 287 wild ducks. My home is at Kingsville, Ont., on the north shore of lake Erie, due north of Pelee island and twenty-six miles southeast of Detroit.

Line of Flight
for Birds

Kingsville is the place where more fowls of the air go than anywhere else in North America, I believe.

I have twelve tags from Ohio, nine from Kentucky, nine from Tennessee, and seven from Alabama. I have one from Saskatchewan, one from Alberta and several from Manitoba. I have only four or five tags from west of the Mississippi. I have them as far east as Long Island, New York, as far west as Alberta, as far south as Louisiana and as far north as Sault Ste. Marie. I haven't a tag for a wild duck north of Sault Ste. Marie, although I know they go further north.

I have nine wild goose tags from Chesapeake bay, seven from North Carolina, one from Maryland and one from New Jersey, but none between my home and the southeast coast of Chesapeake bay. Do these wild geese fly clear over to that Kingsville pond without a stop?

Now, they stay with me about two months. They come about the first of March—in fact, they have come as early as February 20, and as late as March 16—and stay until the last week in April or the first of May. We have had 25 tags returned from James bay and Hudson bay, namely, 24 from the east coast but only one from the west side of James bay—from Albany. Those 25 tags, ladies and gentlemen, are in my possession, and I am sorry I did not bring them along. The Indians shoot them and take the tags to the Hudson's Bay Company agent, I suppose through curiosity, mostly, and the Hudson's Bay agents eventually return the tags. I have 25 out of 102 that I put on; 25 have been returned from there and only 9 from the south.

Befriending
Wild Geese

How did I find out about these wild geese? I have gone five miles from home before the stars closed their eyes in the morning. Wild geese were quite

scarce; I went four mornings in succession and never saw one. There I lay under a blanket, just as the stars were closing their eyes, with three or four wild goose decoys out. Suddenly, at daylight, I see

friend wild goose coming, bringing his family with him. I can just see the tips of the wings begin to move—a faint hum, coming closer. Everything is pretty quiet—but my heart sinks; here are two men coming out there in the next field. It's all off; those fellows will secure the geese. But no, that old leader goes right over them—now he has passed them. There I am under the blanket—possibly it is a sheet if there is a little snow on the ground—the three corners are tied down and I am underneath it, just hidden there, with a gun ready. And the leader swings around, and, as he swings around, he calls and starts to drop his big black feet to come down. But, for some unaccountable reason, he changes his note and climbs into the air—everybody looks out for himself; and the minute he changed his note they all darted in as many different directions as there were geese—it was the danger signal. What did he see? One of my red hairs, possibly, projecting from underneath that blanket. He did not shy from the other men, but, he said: "That red-headed fellow over there killed two of my family last year." Ladies and gentlemen, two and two make four—if the wild goose knows his enemy, why wouldn't he know his friend?

I have only ten acres; how can I protect the geese?
Even the Boys There are eight boys around the neighbourhood.
Protect the Geese In 1904, I said to them: "If you won't shoot at the wild geese around here, I will see that you get a chance to shoot one in the pond." In 1905, 1906 and 1907 no wild geese came. One morning in 1908, eleven wild geese came, and they had not been there ten minutes before the boys came along with their guns. I said: "Boys, leave it entirely with me; do not shoot at them for a week or two." "But," they said, "you said we could shoot them?" I said: "Boys, if you don't get the opportunity to shoot a wild goose I will give you \$10 each, if you let me manage it." They said: "We don't want your money." Of course, they knew I didn't have it. However, in about three weeks, we hoisted a signal, "Go on, boys." We were behind a bank I had thrown up there. Uncle Jack was to shoot the two ganders. The boys lined up on one side and cocked their guns, and, as they raised them, I made it my business to scare the geese so that the boys could not shoot them. Bang went their guns. The two ganders got away, but five geese lay dead in the water—one for each family. I asked the boys not to shoot the others. To my surprise and delight, the other six did not stay away two hours; they came back, and stayed until the time came for them to migrate. If you get one bird to come, there is your opportunity.

The Geese Returned

Next spring, I was asked whether the geese would come back. On March 18, I heard a strange honking and I looked up and saw that they were coming—32 of them. They came down within 100 feet of us; I walked out, and they never flew away. I had the privilege of seeing them introduce their families. The boys shot 10, and that left 22 to go away. Next spring, I was asked: "When will the geese return?" They started to come on March 4, and, in less than two weeks, there were over 400 there. The boys shot 16 and let the rest go. See how our flock of geese had multiplied; we now had a flock of over 350. They started coming on February 20, and, when the first was whirling down, I counted 175 shots at him between my home and lake Erie. When the first was lighting in the pond, you couldn't see the end of the string of families that were coming.

Five Acres of Geese

I don't know whether you have experienced it, but there is nothing more embarrassing than to have more guests than you can feed. There I was, on Good Friday of 1913, with a five-acre field full of wild geese. We couldn't begin to feed them. Some of the geese must have told their friends what was not true, and had induced them to come to a place where there was not enough to eat. We brought the feed close to the house and let the tamer ones come there to eat. I was speaking at the Rotary Club in London the other day, and one gentleman asked me how I moved the birds. This was my explanation to him: If you want to move your birds, keep moving the food accordingly, and pretty soon you can put the spoon in your mouth and the birds will alight on it.

I will tell you about one family, one of a dozen interesting cases last autumn. On October 10, six geese came. By the way, we have never had over 150 in the autumn. I went out and called to these six geese, and the old gander answered. He knew me. I got twelve ears of corn, and threw one of them at him. Just as I did so the four baby geese jumped in the air, but he called them and they dropped down. Then I threw more ears of corn, and each time the same thing would happen; he would sound that low note, and every time he did so the geese would come down. By the time I had thrown the eighth ear he had convinced them that all was well, and they did not fly up any more. It was interesting to watch him trying to educate them to take the kernels of corn off the ear, but it was strange to them. He would get a kernel off and drop it down, but it was fully fifteen minutes before he got those goslings to take the corn; when they did start, they cleaned off every kernel of the twelve ears. That told me these young goslings had never seen an ear of corn before,

and that they had come all the way from Hudson bay without a mouthful and had dropped down there. The old gander had led them all the way down.

My mother-in-law's daughter and I coaxed this old gander and his five goslings into the coop and she held the door while I went in and clamped a tag on his leg. After I tagged him I took him to the door and threw him out—this same old gander that had been telling his boys and girls to eat the corn and to stay there and not be afraid. When I threw the gander out, did he fly to the lake? To know the Canada goose is to love him forever, and if there is any person in Ottawa who can tell me how that most intelligent, self-sacrificing bird came to be honoured by being called the Canada goose, I wish he would write me. You cannot show me any of his actions that one need be ashamed of, not one.

Wild Geese
Came Back

To resume my story. This old gander went out, and when he was about two rods away he turned around and looked back. You could hear him calling for the rest of his family in that little catch pen. At this moment, Mrs. Miner would rather have been on the inside looking out than on the outside looking in, because, as I was catching Number 2, the gander came right back to the door and tried to break in and get at me. We are talking about the same bird that I tried to get a shot at three fields away; here he is now fighting to get at me to protect his young—trying to get his young out. He didn't leave that door until every one of his family had been liberated; he stood right there and fought for them. We caught him the second time, put a cuff on each leg and named him "Sir John Moore," and we put on the tag this verse of scripture:

"No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."

They migrated as usual, and, on March 17 following, the boys said "Look, Dad," and there was Sir John Moore looking for more corn, with the two cuffs on his legs. Five of his family had returned; he had taken care of them down in the southern states all winter, and brought them back. The last week in April they disappeared and my heart sank when I opened a letter from Fort George, James bay, and found four of the tags. The letter read: "The Indian says that seven geese came into their decoys, and they killed four of them. Each one had a tag on it." You know just how I would feel, although that is part of the game. To the fellow who wants to shoot, let me say this: I am not opposed to a man shooting a bird or two, but will you not join with us in limiting your bag? Remember, the bird that falls out of the air from our deadly aim gives you and

me a little pleasure, but deprives thousands of people of pleasure and recreation in seeing it alive. Let us consider that; let us think it over.

Effect of Protection Delilah raised during the six seasons, five families, two of eight, and two of nine, and, this year, she came home with twelve. What does game protection mean? Protect one duck, and you can quickly figure out what the total increase in six years will be. Delilah returned for the sixth time and raised these five families. I have not seen her since August.

The Canada goose is the most faithful and self-sacrificing bird on earth. I kept one for four years, and I know. I kept old Jack Johnson for two years and a half, but I got rid of him. I wouldn't keep a wild goose or gander around the premises after he had lost his sweetheart; they just keep on honking in that sad way. But the poorest principled piece of live flesh in feathers is the drake; he is nothing but a Brigham Young, that's all.

DR. MURRAY: I think you will agree with me that we have heard something very much out of the ordinary this morning; Mr. Miner's address has been the embodiment of red hot enthusiasm. I think it can be well understood how Mr. Miner—I beg his pardon, Jack Miner—and his "mother-in-law's daughter" live a very happy life among the birds they love and that love them. Some exceedingly interesting things have been brought to our attention by the lecturer, perhaps not the least interesting being the different standards of morality existing between the goose and the duck. The goose, apparently, might be held up as a standard for the human race.

Feeding the Birds **MR. MINER:** The question has been asked me if these geese all migrate. They do, this is only a stopping place for them; they are never there in the winter or in the summer. Someone enquired whether I supplied all the food? You have all noticed that the poorer a man is the more dogs he keeps. As a matter of fact, I got what we call "cold feet." A hard-working man, with no advantages, you understand—what could I do? Just at that time my particular friend, who is to speak this afternoon, Mr. John Burnham, of New York, invited me to go to Buffalo and to meet some of his friends there. I went, and they found out what I was doing. Before I left the building that night, they donated \$125 to help feed the birds, and New York state that winter carried the feeding right through. A gentleman of New York state sent me enough money to feed the birds, but last spring costs got pretty heavy. Geese were lowering, feed was soaring, and I fed

them out of my own pocket over \$600 worth of feed during the months of March and April. Our Ontario Government gave me \$100 and I accepted it.

MR. JAMES WHITE: I asked Hon. Mr. McDiarmid, Minister of Public Works for Ontario, who is also in charge of the Department of Game and Fisheries, to do something in this matter, and we hope that the estimates of the Province of Ontario, when brought down, will contain an item sufficient to recompense Mr. Miner for any expenditure that he may incur in feeding this wild game.

MR. MINER: Don't think that there are any hard feelings at all. I am glad as it is; I wouldn't undo it for \$5,000. We have demonstrated what a man with no natural advantages and very limited means can do alone; what can the people of North America do for these God-given creatures with their combined forces? It is not what we can have; it is what we will have. We want bird protection and we are going to have it.

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